

Message Text

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PAGE 01 RIYADH 00447 120820Z

ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-10 LAB-04

NSAE-00 SIL-01 MEE0-01 MMO-01 HA-05 L-03 PER-01

/046 W

-----030240 121023Z /11

R 120502Z JUN 78

FM USLO RIYADH

TO AMEMBASSY JIDDA

SECSTATE WASHDC 519

AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SHUM, SA, US

SUBJECT: SAUDI DECREE ON EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN

REF: RIYADH 397

1. DURING MEETING JUNE 11 WITH SAUDI FOREIGN MINISTER PRINCE SAUD AL-FEISAL, AMBASSADOR RAISED SUBJECT OF RECENT INTERIOR MINISTRY DECREE ON EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN SAUDI ARABIA. AMBASSADOR WAS CAREFUL TO POINT OUT THAT HE HAD NOT BEEN ASKED TO OFFICIALLY RAISE THE MATTER BUT HE SAW POTENTIAL DANGER AHEAD AND HOPED TO ALERT SAUD OF POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES. AMBASSADOR SAID THAT IN ADDITION TO SEVERE HARDSHIP WHICH ENFORCEMENT OF DECREE WOULD BRING TO U.S. COMPANIES OPERATING IN SAUDI ARABIA, SOME DEFENSE CONTRACTORS WOULD FIND THEMSELVES IN VIOLATION OF U.S. LAWS WHICH PROHIBIT DISCRIMINATION BASED ON SEX.

2. PRINCE SAUD INTERRUPTED TO STATE EMPHATICALLY THAT THERE WAS NO DECREE PROHIBITING WOMEN FROM WORKING IN KINGDOM. IT WAS ONLY QUESTION OF THEM OBTAINING THE PROPER WORK PERMITS. AMBASSADOR REFERRED TO MINISTERIAL DECREE NOTING THAT IT CALLED FOR SEVERE PENALTIES AGAINST EMPLOYER AND EMPLOYEE WHEN WOMEN

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WERE WORKING IN VIOLATION OF SAUDI LABOR LAW. SAUD RESPONDED THAT NO COMPANY SHOULD TAKE STEPS TO TERMINATE WOMEN EMPLOYEES ON THEIR OWN INITIATIVE. THEY SHOULD WAIT UNTIL SAG CONTACTS THEM FORMALLY TO SAY A SPECIFIC DECREE OR REGULATION APPLIES TO THEM. AMBASSADOR PERSISTED TO ASK IF THAT MEANT NO WOMEN WOULD BE ARRESTED OR EMPLOYER FINED AND SAUD REPEATED THAT THEY SHOULD WAIT FOR CONFIRMATION THAT THE REGULATION APPLIED TO A SPECIFIC

COMPANY. HE ASSURED AMBASSADOR THERE WOULD BE NO ARRESTS OR
FINES.

3. AMBASSADOR TOLD SAUD THIS WAS REASSURING INFORMATION WHICH HE
INTENDED TO PASS TO AMERICAN COMPANIES. HE REITERATED HIS
HOPE THAT WAY COULD BE FOUND WITHIN SAG TO SET FORTH PROCEDURES
WHICH WOMEN COULD FOLLOW TO OBTAIN PROPER AND LEGAL DOCUMENTATION
TO WORK IN KINGDOM. HE ADDED HE WAS PARTICULARLY GLAD TO KNOW
NOTHING WOULD HAPPEN THAT COULD CAUSE EMBARRASSMENT TO ADMINIS-
TRATION WHICH CONSIDERED HUMAN RIGHTS A CORNERSTONE OF ITS
POLICY. SAUD INDICATED HE UNDERSTOOD.

4. WILL BE PROVIDING ADDITIONAL COMMENT ON CURRENT STATE OF
BEAUROCRATIC ACTIVITY ON THIS QUESTION BY SEPTTEL.
GNEHM

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